




## Zoo Spaces Design Challenge




Aaron Pals  
 5th Grade General Education  
 Jordan Creek Elementary  
 Blank Park Zoo, DSM, IA


### Overview of the Business

The Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines, Ia. has been a popular place to visit since May 8th, 1966 when it first opened its doors to the public. They are not only focused on providing an engaging way to interact with animals but also on several educational, conservation, research, and recreational initiatives.

The following website gives a great overview of the development and expansion of the Blank Park Zoo over the last five decades.  
<https://www.blankparkzoo.com/about-us/history/>



## The Problem




From time to time the Blank Park zoo will have the opportunity to get new species. In this extremely hypothetical situation all the zoo design experts in the world have vanished. Even so, the Blank Park Zoo is going to acquire several new animals in a few months. We have to have plans for a new building to keep them in and a new exhibit space in which the public can view the new species. In addition, students will also have a writing component in which they will gather information that will be used for the different informational signage on display in and around the exhibits they design.




## The Solution



Zoo design experts would know how much space the animals need in their holding and when they are on exhibit. They would know what they need and like to do for activities. They would take into consideration their natural habitat and the problems Iowa's climate might pose when thinking about how to keep them healthy and comfortable. For instance, when discussing a new holding area for animals from warmer climates, do we need to allocate additional funds for heated flooring in some areas of the overnight holding or in the exhibit space.




## Job Specifics




In relation to this hypothetical problem solving exercise, the zoo keepers would actually work in tandem with architectural designers and mechanical/structural engineers to create safe spaces for animals and keepers alike. This would include heating and cooling for warm/cold blooded species, padded flooring, etc.


In relation to my actual duties during the externship, I can share that the immersive experience at the zoo allowed me to get a real life sense of the profession. I think most people think zookeeping would be fun because you might get to hug a tiger or swim with a sea lion. It is much more a kin to parenting or teaching; a rewarding job that is realized in the frustrating, yet blissful form of baby steps. One day, a huge success might finally seeing your lions mate and knowing you'll see a cub soon. On another day, it might be getting a giraffe to take one more step toward their exhibit. Either way, you still have all the cleaning, caring, organizing, and paperwork, too.




## Background



Students will need to know some terms related to zoo keeping, several characteristics of the animals they are designing spaces for. Some information will be provided and some will be found by research on the student's part. Similarly, zoos typically know what they want but not what financial boundaries they have until specific plans are made. Just like any construction project, there are cadillac materials and then materials that will do job but aren't as fancy. Depending on the amount raised from donors, some compromises might need to be made when designing certain spaces. While this is certainly a real life problem, my 5th grade students will not be asked to solve any issues concerning fiduciary complications.



## Student Solutions



Students might consider using the following sources to research and design their exhibit space, hold space, and visitor kiosk informational boards:

- Searching for articles or other informational texts that tell students various characteristics of the species being studied.
- Checking various zoo websites and researching the differences in how some zoos care for or display different species.
- Correspondence with zoo keepers through e-mail.
- Educational and research focused websites like the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.